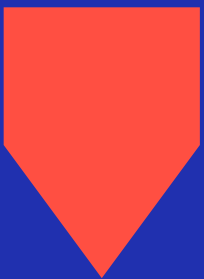


First Draft Impact Report

q1. 2021



q1

q2

q3

q4

The Covid-19 pandemic — and its accompanying infodemic — made it abundantly clear how high the stakes are in the fight against online misinformation. The events of 2021 have only reaffirmed this.

The year opened with a distressing confirmation of how lies, conspiracy theories and radicalization can lead to democracy-shaking violence — the January 6 siege of the US Capitol. Then, the onslaught of vaccine disinformation showed how vulnerable critical healthcare systems are to bad information.

Just as the dangers of online misinformation have become fully apparent, so too has the importance of high-quality reporting, which we are proud to support.

This quarter, First Draft has responded with further innovation and focus. We have delivered pioneering support for reporters covering the Capitol insurrection, vaccine misinformation and the wider world of online disinformation, and have exciting plans for the rest of the year.

The story

Awards and recognition

We were grateful this quarter to be recognized with award nominations. Investigative reporter Keenan Chen won a Milwaukee Press Club award for “Best Public Service Story or Series” with his work on stories exposing election-related disinformation in Wisconsin around the 2020 election, in collaboration with UW-Madison’s Center for Journalism Ethics and Wisconsin Watch.

The work of our training manager, Laura Garcia, was also nominated for a Webby. She worked with the team at “Take on Fake” to explain [in a short video](#) how to fact check like a journalist. Voting is open until May 6; we invite you to [add your support](#).

The months ahead

It has never been clearer that we need to do more than react to the misinformation spreading online. We need to understand its roots in societal injustices and prepare for misinformation before it hits.

We will be identifying vaccine narratives and vaccine misinformation flowing across social media channels used by many Black and Latinx communities in the US, and we will develop, deliver and evaluate a series of “train the trainer” events, with bootcamps for journalists from Black and Latinx communities.

To help us respond to and learn from vaccine misinformation, we’ll be publishing monthly reports recapping the top trends, narratives and emerging threats. This will provide both direction for interventions and an archive for future analysis and training.

We will also be responding to calls for greater labeling of misinformation, particularly AI-manipulated content, with a series of publications on how to signpost content online. This will include guidance for journalists on overlays (visual filters to cover misinformation and warn readers of its presence in articles).

+140%

51 training events

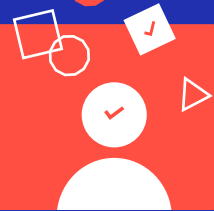


Three time zones

Nine languages

39 workshops

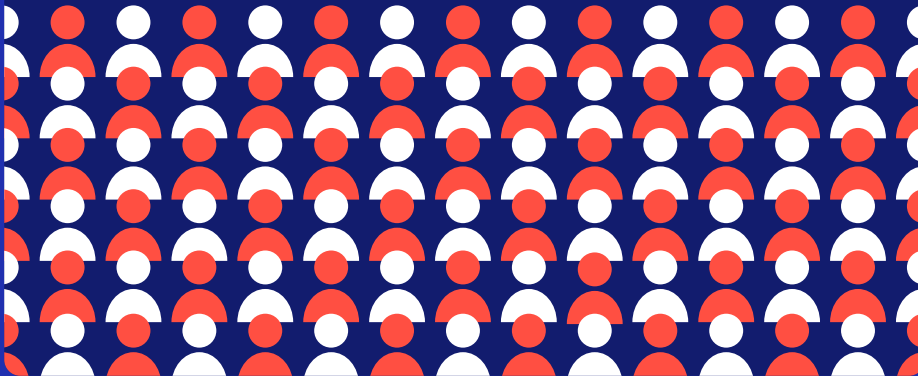
6,149 people trained



273,000

+22%

visitors to the website



The numbers

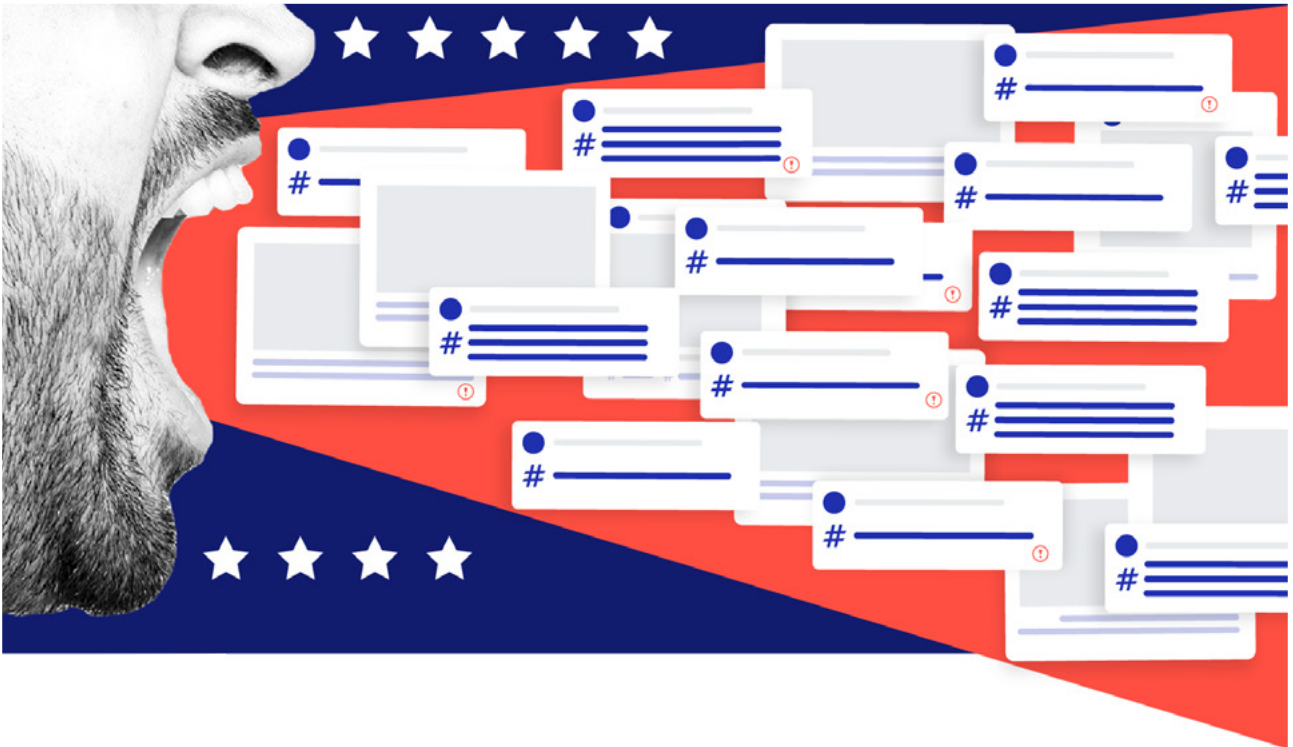
+24%

1,006 news stories with contributions from First Draft

Over 10,000

subscribers to our briefings

+27%



The Capitol

In a year where we have all become acutely aware of the dangerous real-world consequences of online disinformation during the pandemic, the attack on the US Capitol underscored the extent to which online disinformation can damage our societies and communities.

The events of January 6 presented many challenges for reporters: verifying eyewitness media, monitoring across multiple (and new) social media platforms, and keeping track of a chaotic set of announcements from those platforms.

We took action that day, compiling a fact sheet for a network of trusted journalists and researchers; it outlined key narratives, hashtags, organizers and platform activities. We hosted a Q&A via Zoom on January 7 based on our monitoring; we assembled a [live spreadsheet](#) to catalog policy and enforcement actions by tech and social media companies. We also continued to update our Slack community, private Twitter community and our [US 2020 Dashboard](#) with insights from our monitoring and verification. We then shared our takeaways with a [synthesis of what we learned from the events](#).

As we saw the full potential of globally networked misinformation in 2020, it quickly became apparent that 2021 would be defined by the vaccine.

We had already built a solid foundation. We published in-depth analyses of case studies in [Pakistan and the Philippines](#); reviewed [research into vaccine misinformation and how it applies to today's information ecosystem](#); and launched a major piece of [research into the narratives surrounding vaccines](#), sounding the alarm about what was to come.

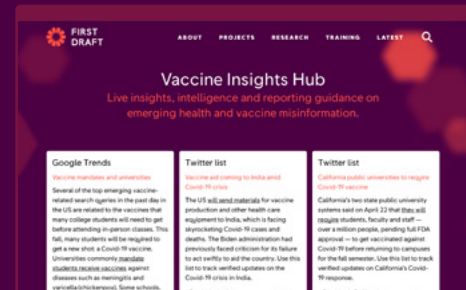
In Q1 2021, we drew on these insights, resources and methods to launch a major program to support those relied upon for accurate information about vaccines.

Vaccine Insights

The hub

The [Vaccine Insights Hub](#) has provided a center of expertise on vaccine misinformation, narratives and data deficits for everyone who is providing information on the immunization effort.

In the two months since we launched, we have updated the hub several hundred times with new findings, insights and data. Managed by our global team, we have kept the space an active hub for reporters, researchers and others, building on what we learned from our US 2020 Dashboard.



The workshops

We have also built out our most ambitious training program yet, covering three time zones, nine languages and 39 workshops. We have featured the building blocks for reporting on vaccine misinformation, with short, actionable sessions and regular recaps designed specifically for busy people. We have also published [a concise study guide](#) that recaps the core learnings.

We have used this opportunity to integrate and coordinate our existing resources and skills into a unified, customizable offering. We are excited to use this as a model for future programs.

Monitoring

We have been publishing eight email briefings every week, with insights from our international monitoring team to aid interventions from reporters, researchers, policymakers and interested citizens. We now have over 10,000 people subscribed to our monitoring briefings.

We've also been providing daily topline on mis- and disinformation that could pose harms to the Black, Afro Latinx and Latinx communities, along with simulations, training and weekly office hours.

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Reporting

Original reporting on vaccine misinformation is a critical tool in our mission. By uncovering new tactics, offering explanatory reporting on new platforms and communities, and creating case studies and reading lists from which others can learn, our editorial work is a key lever for our impact. As we discuss later in this report, it is part of our “show and tell” strategy: sharing narratives and tactics, and in turn methods of reporting on online spaces.

- [Vaccine infertility claims on YouTube sweep across fringe platforms](#)
- [How we investigated Covid-19 vaccine misinformation on Facebook](#)
- [Fringe health group Comusav promotes chlorine dioxide as a cure for Covid-19](#)
- [Fringe communities feed on RT coverage to undermine Covid-19 vaccinations](#)
- [How anti-vaccination websites build audiences and monetize misinformation](#)
- [Data deficits around Covaxin contribute to vaccine hesitancy in India](#)
- [The Nation of Islam and anti-vaccine rhetoric](#)
- [From HPV to Covid-19: Personal stories power anti-vaccine misinformation](#)
- [Pro-Russian networks are driving anti-Pfizer vaccine disinformation](#)

In a field involving niche technologies, technical skills and a host of ethical challenges, it can be difficult to guide newcomers through their next steps in online investigations.

One way we've innovated in this area is through “show and tell” — showing how investigations are done through original reporting, then telling others how they can do it themselves. This offers an opportunity for relevant, practical and non-abstract teaching for the online investigator. Our aim is to provide value both in what we uncover and in how we teach the process, so we can open up online investigations to more people.

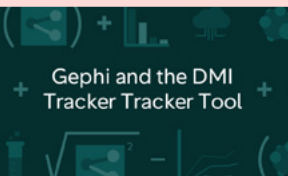
Show & tell
shows

Digital Investigation Recipes

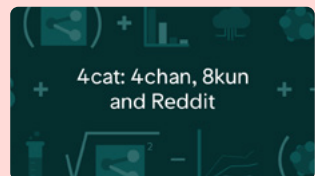
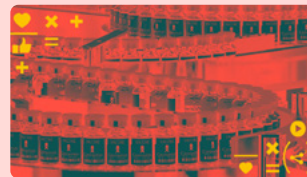
First Draft has developed new techniques and methodologies for investigating online spaces, including partnerships with the Public Data Lab and the Digital Methods Initiative. Our collaborations date back to the 2017 “Field Guide to Fake News” and continue to this day. Part of the challenge we take on is explaining niche methods and tools in a way that feels relevant to everyday work.

Our latest approach revolves around the concept of recipes. As with food recipes, these sets of steps give direction to investigators while allowing room for flexibility and adaptation.

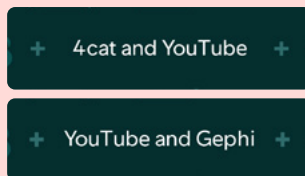
We have been running our investigations for four weeks in Q1, and they will continue for three more.



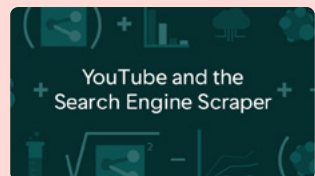
- Investigation: How anti-vaccination websites build audiences and monetize misinformation
- Recipe: How are they funded? Investigating ad trackers with Gephi and the DMI Tracker Tracker tool



- Investigation: Pro-Russian networks are driving anti-Pfizer vaccine disinformation
- Recipe: Track misinformation across platforms on 4chan, 8kun and Reddit



- Investigation: Vaccine infertility claims on YouTube sweep across fringe platforms
- Recipe: How to find misleading YouTube videos on fringe platforms
- Recipe: Misinformation networks on YouTube: recommended videos



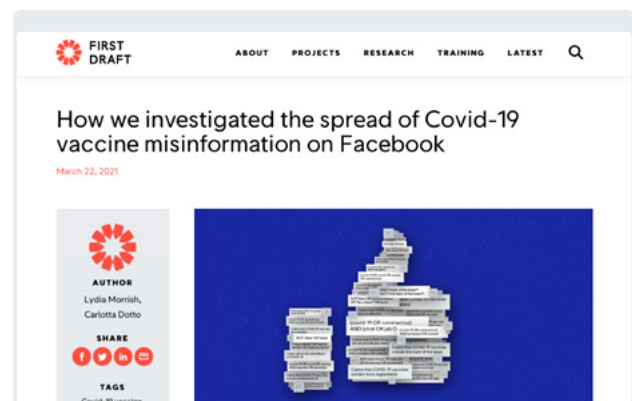
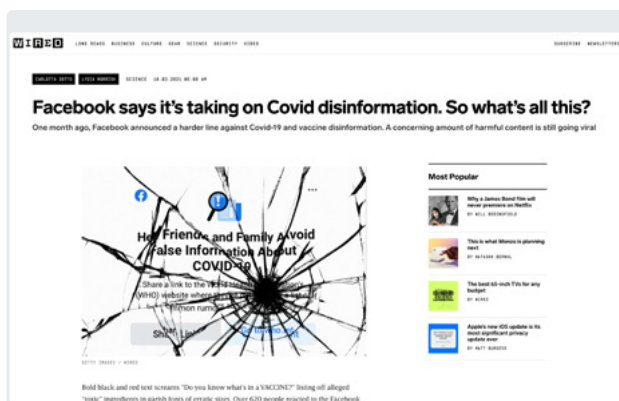
- Investigation: Fringe communities feed on RT coverage to undermine Covid-19 vaccinations
- Recipe: Tracking YouTube videos across the web

Collaboration with WIRED

To reach larger audiences with this approach, First Draft journalists Carlotta Dotto and Lydia Morrish collaborated with WIRED, publishing an investigation on Covid disinformation on Facebook and a follow-up explaining how they did it.

Their approach was not only to walk readers through the methodology, but also to confront the ethical challenges of this type of work.

- [Facebook says it's taking on Covid disinformation. So what's all this?](#)
- [How we investigated Covid-19 vaccine misinformation on Facebook](#)



Case studies, reading lists and introductions

As part of our efforts to open up the black box of social media investigations, we have also provided [case studies](#), [reading lists](#), [introductions](#) and [explainers](#) to make it easier for others to accurately report on disinformation.

This has been especially important because of the proliferation of new platforms and reporting priorities that have come to the fore as the field must increasingly grapple with a splintered ecosystem.

Q1 2021 has been one of our biggest quarters ever for training, in both the number of events and the number of people we have trained. We have also created new products and built new partnerships to expand our reach and support.

One of our greatest challenges as a global company is to make our training resources accessible to non-English-speaking audiences. We've undertaken our most ambitious effort yet in this regard, with live translation of our vaccine workshops in nine languages.

Another tool we have used this quarter is our language hubs: pages with all our resources in French and Spanish, with more languages to come. This provides not only a destination for those in our training sessions to find resources in their language, but also a way to showcase the depth of our available expertise in a single place.

- [Recursos en español](#)
- [Ressources en français](#)

Training

This quarter we depended on our team's global reach more than ever, particularly through our Asia-Pacific Bureau, headed up by Anne Kruger. We delivered 14 training sessions on vaccine misinformation for our APAC communities.

The bureau was also pre-emptive in coverage ahead of the Myanmar coup, and led misinformation coverage of Papua New Guinea for ABC RMIT Fact Check, which we rounded up in [a case study report](#). Toward the end of the quarter, the bureau also held a roundtable discussion with science and medicine communication experts and attended by leading media, academia and government representatives, the outcomes of which we synthesized in [a call to action for the field](#).

Asia-Pacific

BBC Trusted News Initiative

As a partner of the Trusted News Initiative, US Director Claire Wardle attended a panel on misinformation at [the inaugural Trust In News conference](#), sharing insights with the journalism community and beyond.

International Committee of the Red Cross

One of our major partnerships in Q1 was with the International Committee of the Red Cross. We trained staff from across the world and helped them to build out their internal policies. We are looking forward to continuing our support in the coming months.

Journalists for Human Rights

We trained over a dozen reporters at Journalists for Human Rights Canada, so they could train others in countering disinformation. This was part of our work to build resilience across Canada in English, French and Cree communities.

Partnerships & collaborations

Thank you.